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**To Migrate or to Stay?
Mobility and Retention of Rural
Population in South India**

**A Field Survey of Villagers' Rationales
in Mandya District, Karnataka**

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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To Migrate or to Stay?
Mobility and Retention of Rural Population in South India
A Field Survey of Villagers' Rationales in Mandya District, Karnataka

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THE RETENTION OF RURAL POPULATION : A DECISIVE ISSUE

The number and the size of the large Indian metropolises cannot conceal the originality of the evolution of the urban-rural balance in India. While most of the Latin American countries are already over-urbanized—a trend that many African countries seem to follow at their own pace—, India is still able to maintain in her villages almost 75% of her population, this despite an adverse land-man ratio and very high rural population density. How and why? These questions have to be raised because the issues at stake are decisive: if this retention of rural population were to collapse, and if the migrations to urban areas were to increase at the rapid pace that is commonly observed in many of the developing countries, then the entire image of India would change as this would affect both the present social texture and the economic structure of the country, to say nothing of her political equilibrium.

But retention of rural population does not denote immobility nor immobilism. On one hand, the Indian countryside is evolving under the twin impact of socio-economic dynamics and government policies, on the other, the rural population is getting more dependent upon the various patterns of mobility¹.

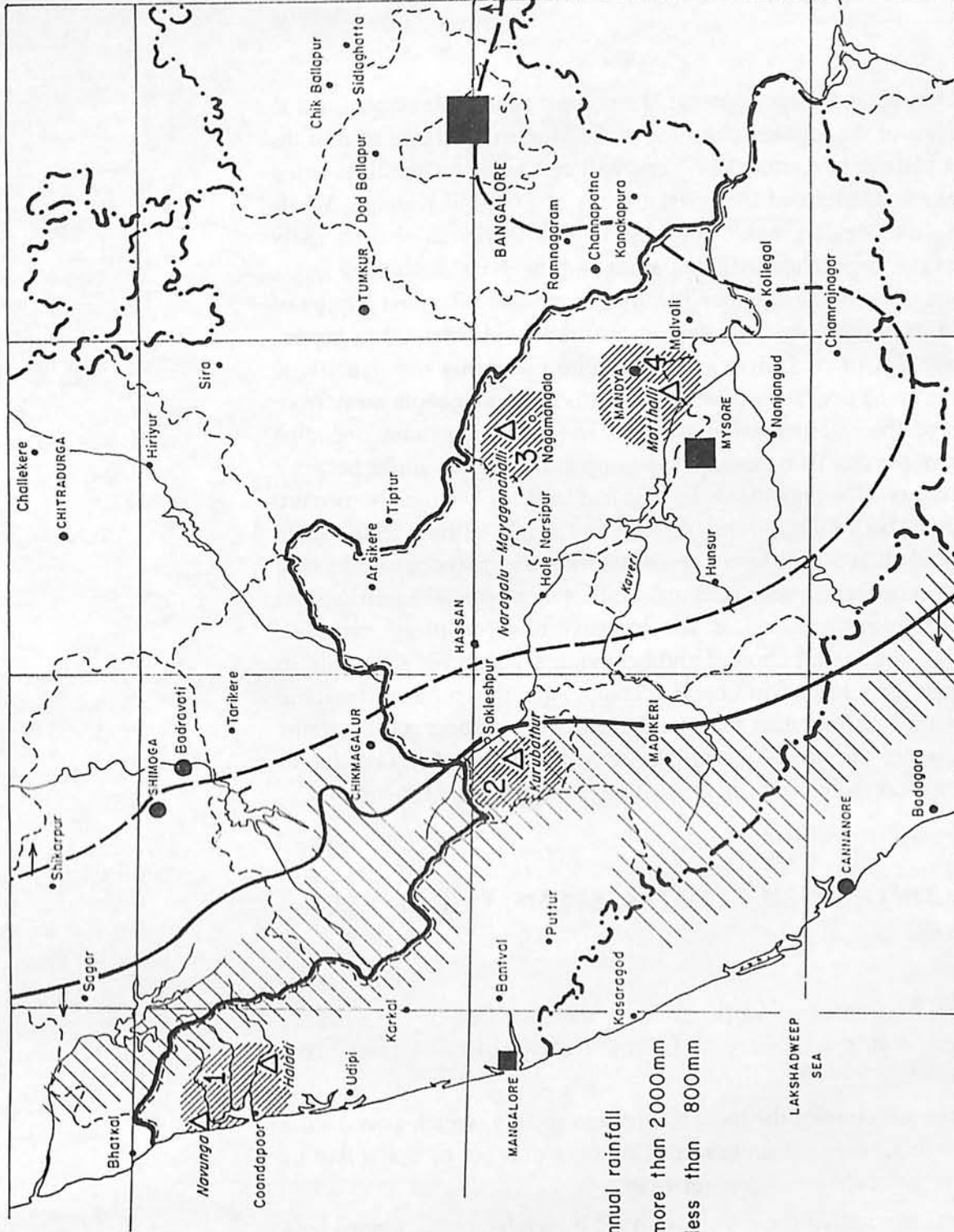
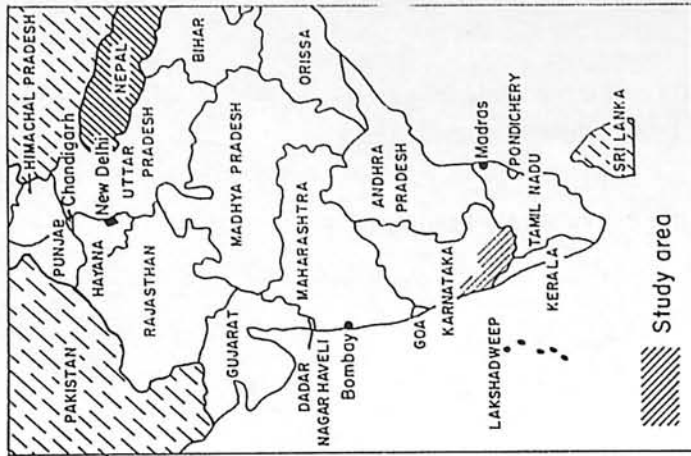
In the given context, we have tried to reverse the questions generally raised by most migration studies. Most of these studies, in India or abroad, have been conducted in towns. Enquiries and interviews, if any, were usually based upon those who had migrated. Here, on the contrary, we pay more attention to the dynamics of the countryside and surveys and interviews are conducted primarily in the villages. This is to enable us to understand not only why people migrate, but also and essentially, from a more novel point of view (at least as far as India is concerned), why they do not migrate despite the hardships of village life, or (between these two extremes) why and how many rural families make do with alternatives to definite migration (such as occupational change without geographical change, seasonal migration, leaving the family behind in the village, taking turns

to migrate, etc.,). These alternatives, along with rural-rural migrations, testify to a strong attachment to village roots and underline a fundamental pattern: mobility is not necessarily conducive to full fledged migration to town.

Basing itself on this issue, an Indo-French research project is presently carried out in four southern districts of the state of Karnataka, in South India². Besides an assesment of secondary data available at taluk and village levels, surveys are carried out in four clearly differing rural systems typifying the diversity observed along a transect line drawn from the western coast to the Deccan plateau. For each system, one or more villages are selected for intensive studies. These four rural systems are identified as below:

- A "green revolution" area, where paddy and sugarcane are irrigated by means of the dam and canals of Krishnarajasagar, in the south of Mandya District. The village selected for a case study is Mottahalli.
- A second rural system, covering a much larger area, is based on dry farming. Ragi and jowar are the basic crops in these poor lands, less-densely populated than the earlier ones. Here, seasonal outmigration is a regular means of eking out a living. The villages selected for study are Mayagonahalli and Naragalu, to the north of Mandya District (Nagamangala taluk).
- A third rural system is identified in the Western Ghats (Hassan District, Sakleshpur taluk), where agriculture and plantations are found side by side. Three small villages are selected in Kurubathur panchayat for an assesment of the sub-system where agriculture predominates. Another sub-system is defined in areas where large coffee plantations are established. The in-migration movement linked with the development of these large plantations is today stabilized in the Ghats, but seasonal migration from the drylands is still very much practised.
- A fourth rural system is recognized in Dakshin Kannad District. Here, the archaisms of the social structure contrast with the economic dynamism promoted by the coastal national highway running from Kerala to Bombay. Two sub-types of this mobile and very complex society are observed in Navunga and Haladi villages in Coondapoor taluk.

The map enclosed provides an overall view of the areas selected for studies.



Annual rainfall

- more than 2000mm
- - - less than 800mm

Western Ghats

- State boundary
- - - District boundary

Study area boundary

Selected rural systems:

- 1 Coastal area in Dakshin Kannad
- 2 Ghat system in Hassan District
- 3 System based on dry farming (north of Mandya District)

- 4 "Green revolution" area: Krishnarajasagar command area (south of Mandya District)

△ Site of village studies

Urban population 1981

- 20 000-50 000
- 50 000-75 000
- 100 000-110 000
- 130 000-160 000
- 300 000
- 3 000 000

Thus set in a larger context, the present paper will be confined to an analysis of the villages observed in the Maidan —a large tract of the Deccan plateau in Karnataka—, and will cast aside for the time being the Western Ghats and the coastal areas of Dakshin Kannad. While studying the Maidan, one cannot but underline the major dichotomy between the large scale irrigated areas and the dry tracts where a few tanks and some pumpsets sporadically irrigate a very limited portion of the land. Naturally, such a strong dichotomy is also bound to govern the rationales of mobility, and it is quite clear that the paucity of resources in the dry lands drives comparatively more people away from the village, thereby increasing mobility. But in the meantime, one must emphasize the fact that although local opportunities may differ between the dry tracts of Naragalu and the irrigated lands of Mottahalli, men are the same in both villages: they belong to a single culture, to the same castes, and share, in different contexts, the same preoccupations of a peasantry concerned with land and employment, social insertion and family relationships, quest for improvement or plain survival. Strategies, rationales, choices and behaviours which we are trying to investigate may henceforth be also analyzed within a macro regional framework. Not forgetting the specificities of the distinct rural systems which govern the life of the villagers, we must nonetheless strive to paint a non-disaggregated image of South Karnataka rural society.

TWO CONTRASTED RURAL SYSTEMS, ONE UNEVEN SOCIETY

The rationales at work amongst the dwellers of the villages observed result basically —let us oversimplify— from five determinants:

- the structure of the local Kannadiga society, which governs the overall cultural values, and hence a number of collective or family behaviours and relations.
- the strength of the socio-economic hierarchy, characterized by a complex relationship between caste and class and by an unequal access to resources.
- the multifold contrast between dry lands and large scale irrigated areas, the first being of course much less endowed even if less densely populated.
- the overall dynamics of change affecting every single feature of rural life as found in Karnataka today.

- last but not the least, the impact of individual strategies, which of course prevents choices and behaviours from being the direct result of mere determinism.

Mobility or retention of rural population being basically spatial concepts, a preliminary presentation of the rural systems involved will provide a significant background to our analysis.

"Green revolution" areas and dry lands: two rural systems in the Maidan

The contrast between the two systems observed is in fact a fundamental one, and is found not only in the Maidan but also on an All India basis.³

Around Mandya town lies one of the best types of irrigated lands in South India, thanks to the Krishnarajasagar dam diverting the Kaveri waters through the Visveswaraya canal to villages where, during the past fifty years, an intensive and capitalistic agriculture has developed, founding its growth on the cultivation of paddy and sugarcane, the cane being here the profitable cash crop par excellence. It is important to note that in these areas mechanization remains moderate. In Mottahalli, a rich village of 1670 inhabitants in 1981, the first and lone tractor has been bought only this year (1990), and the distribution of pumpsets is still limited. The "intensity" of agriculture results much more from the adoption of high yielding varieties as per the "green revolution" model, both for paddy and cane, (as early as the 50's for cane) as well as for ragi which is also cultivated when a second paddy crop seems risky undertaking. The sugarcane takes the lead, with almost 40% of the cultivated net area sown, followed by paddy (30%). Intensive agriculture, in this context, is a spatial and time-bound concept as well as a technical one: the villagers are able to cultivate a large part of the village lands (69% in 1981, irrigated for the three-fourths) and the cultivation entails work for a major part of the year, as most of the fields either bear two crops a year (paddy + paddy, or paddy + ragi) or are under cane, planted for at least eleven or twelve months and usually cultivated a second time, through ratooning. The limitation to mechanization expresses itself in another decisive way: the large government owned sugar factory at Mandya has not prevented artisanal crushers from being multiplied in all the villages of the sugar belt. Mottahalli alone has 28 of these large brick sheds with very simple machinery running on electricity which is used to crush the cane into juice, the juice being boiled to jaggery, a non-refined brown sugar that sells well. These crushers, owned by the wealthier peasants, help demarcate the border-line between commercial agriculture as practised

by medium and small farmers planting cane, and capitalist agriculture which invests its surplus either in land or in a crusher (one acre of wet land cost around one lakh —100 000 rupees—, a crusher may cost more).

This type of agriculture combined with the crushing "industry" call for a consistent manpower, as both paddy and sugarcane require care for months altogether and need large teams of harvesters and cutters when ripe. On the whole, the local agricultural labourers can expect to be employed for more than 200 days a year, the actual lean season being confined to two or three months (March-April). The very unequal distribution of assets in such villages provides the farmers with this local manpower consisting of agricultural labourers, most of them being also marginal farmers, or the owners of petty pieces of land: most of the villagers, even the Harijans, are not pure landless in Karnataka. But this local manpower is unable to cope with the needs of the sugarcane crushing season which is at its peak from July to October and may run up to December; hence a regular seasonal migration of poor labourers hailing mainly from the dry tracts of Mysore district.

Despite the multiplication of dams and the expansion of command areas which are one of the most spectacular features of the transformation of Karnataka rural economy, the dry lands are by far the most prevalent. Nagamangala taluk offers a good example of these poor tracts, where the slightly undulating surface of the plateau is now and then dominated by rocky inselbergs. Villages are smaller (Naragalu and Mayagonahalli which we selected for our project had just 500 inhabitants each in 1981) and the overall density of rural population is much lower here than in the irrigated tracts (Nagamangala taluk rural density was 136 inh/km² in 1981 as against 330 for Mandya taluk). Ragi and jowar are the staple crops, paddy being cultivated only in the small patches irrigated by tanks, which do not provide much solace (less than 11% of the cultivated area of Nagamangala taluk was irrigated in 1981, a few large tanks augmenting this ratio, while most of the villages are almost fully dry, such as our two samples where, in 1981, the small tank of Naragalu was only irrigating less than 1% of the joint cultivated area). Subject to the vagaries of a monsoon which even on an average is not very benevolent (the average annual rainfall is 700 mm), dry farming of ragi and jowar provides work for only a few months of the year. The distribution of pumpsets, still very moderate, stimulates a nascent but still patchy cash crop agriculture based on vegetable cultivation, on the still limited spread of high yielding varieties of mulberry, and on the more spectacular expansion of coconut groves. This new trend, accessible only to those who have enough money to invest in pumpsets, has not yet altered the basic

economic structure of these dry lands. Migration, here, has been relied upon for two or three generations.

But what type of migration? A look at the demographic data available readily suggests the remarkable resilience of this rural population. Census after Census as illustrated in table 1, demonstrate the growth of the rural population and rural density of Nagamangala taluk.

Table 1 - The sustained growth of rural population in a dry taluk and in an irrigated one

NAGAMANGALA TALUK	1961	1971	1981	1961/71	1971/81	1961/81
Rural population	101119	117883	141488			
Rural density (km ²)	97	113	136			
Growth rate (%)				16,5	20	40
MANDYA TALUK	1961	1971	1981	1961/71	1971/81	1961/81
Rural population	150056	191179	230994			
Rural density (km ²)	215	273	330			
Growth rate (%)				27	21	54

Source of tables 1, 2 and 3: Mandya District Census Handbook 1961,1971,1981.

If the relatively low growth rate for 1961-71 suggests that some definite out-migration has taken place during that particular decade in Nagamangala taluk (the opposite being apparently true in Mandya taluk), the overall trend for the two decades and the similitude of Nagamangala and Mandya rates for 1971-81 underline with extreme clarity the phenomenon on which we wish to focus our attention. Despite local urban growth (table 2), despite even the striking fact that we are here in the hinterland of Bangalore, the fastest growing city after Delhi amongst the large Indian metropolises, Indian rural population finds ways to cling to its land, and the slow decline of the rural-urban population ratio (table 3) cannot conceal this decisive fact: in dry tracts—even if at a slower pace than in irrigated areas—the rural population is significantly growing, in absolute number, decade after decade.

**Table 2 - The pace of urban growth :
Nagamangala and Mandya towns**

	POPULATION			GROWTH RATE(%)		
	1961	1971	1981	1961/71	1971/81	1961/81
Nagamangala Town	10126	12906	16522	33	28	71
Mandya Town	33347	72132	100285	116	39	201

Table 3 - The evolution of the rural-urban population ratio

	1961	1971	1981
Nagamangala taluk	90.9	90.1	89.5
Mandya taluk ¹	81.8	72.6	69.7
Mandya District	88.8	86.2	84.5
Mysore District ²	75.1	74.5	72.6
Hassan District	87.9	86.4	85.3
Karnataka State ³		75.7	71.1
All India	81.7	79.8	76.3

1. Includes Mandya, the district headquarters, 100285 inh. in 1981

2. Includes Mysore, the regional capital, 441 754 inh. in 1981

3. Bangalore, the State capital, was in 1981 the fifth Indian metropolis, with 2.9 millions inhabitants, and had the second growth ratio for 1951-81 amongst the twelve million-plus Indian Urban Agglomerations (3.74 against 3.98 for Delhi).

In Nagamangala taluk itself, a pocket of meagre natural resources and rural poverty, this absolute growth is on par with an almost constant ratio of rural population : less than a 2% decline in twenty years, and still above 89% in 1981. How many areas in the world, so poorly endowed, with less than 700 mm of annual average rainfall, would sustain a density of more than 130 rural inhabitants per square kilometer? Here is decidedly one of the most significant facets of Indianity.

The types of migration usually selected by those in search of diversified resources will explain why such a specific picture may emerge, and how this apparent contradiction between natural endowment and attachment to one's roots may be resolved. But before going into the rationales and strategies at work at the village level, we must first consider the broad sociological and cultural frame of rural Kannadiga society.

The impact of the social structure: social order and kinship order

Upto what degree can the existing social structure favourize mobility or/and retention of village population? Deliberately limiting ourselves to this question, we may usefully distinguish two spheres of influence. The larger one sets the frame for the prevailing socio-economic order: caste and class hierarchies intermingle strongly and express the fundamental inequality governing ideologically as well as economically rural society. Everywhere "the dominant caste", as coined by Srinivas, expresses clearly its dominance: in number as well as economic power, the Vokkaligas are the governing force controlling village life, and as a rule, most if not all big farmers belong to this caste which owns most of the land⁴. However, the unequal distribution of land and the deprivation of a considerable number of villagers are not such that they can convey an image of absolute contrast between high and low status, castes and classes. In a society where most of the villagers were —and are— small peasants, a number of Vokkaligas have seen their patrimony dwindle before their eyes, and today many Vokkaligas are marginal farmers who have to hire themselves out as agricultural labourers for making both ends meet. On the other hand, in a state where social reformism —even if limited— was always stronger than in most parts of India, the integration of the Harijans and Tribals to the mainstream is somewhat more advanced than, say, in Tamilnadu. The fact that a large number of Harijans now own a piece of land does not mean that they can make a living out of it, but at least this attaches them (positively) to the village. The allotment of the "Janata houses", built usually by the poor with a government grant in cash or kind acts as a great stabilizing force for many —including the landless— who have now a home of their own, on a plot duly recognized as theirs.

More traditional, the patron-client relationships still exist, and contribute also to the stabilization of the poor. In Mottahalli (but not in the dry villages we have surveyed), the extreme case of "permanent labour" bonded to the landlord is still in practice, albeit on the decline as most wealthy families prefer now to keep only two "attached" labourers in their service. On the other hand, in irrigated villages such as Mottahalli, intensive agriculture and cane crushing call for extra manpower during the peak season. The landlords grant cash advances to "free" labourers, who reimburse their dues through agricultural work, and to outsiders, who are thus "booked" one year in advance for the next cane crushing season.

In other words, it appears that the inequality on which the rural social structure is based is not *per se* a decisive push factor. Lack of resources may lead to migration but ordinarily, in the villages that we

have surveyed, deprivation is not absolute. It is of course true of irrigated Mottahalli, which offers a comparatively higher employment scope, and which is able to keep its poor, while attracting seasonally — and sometimes permanently — labourers from the dry tracts of Mysore district. It is true also of the dry lands where the evolved migration patterns are mainly of two types: a seasonal movement of males going to the irrigated lands on pseudo-contracts, (the circulation-type analyzed by Jan Breman in Gujarat)⁵ and a long term-long range migration to cities by one or two members of joint or nuclear families leaving their relatives behind. When the job found in town is secure — i.e., a government employment — a third type is found, with the nuclear family eventually urbanized for decades.

The practicability of the most significant strategy observed in the dry tracts of Nagamangala — the long term-long range male migration to cities — is a direct consequence of the socio-cultural patterns governing family life in India. Three factors are to be taken into consideration in this regard.

The first one is governed by law as well as by tradition, and sets the rules for property. Two opposite precepts regulate the choice open to the landed families. On one hand, the rule of inheritance, according to Hindu law, bequeaths an equal share of the property on each son. This age old tradition is of utmost importance, as the proliferation of micro-properties in India results directly from it: each of the three sons of a small farmer owning three acres of dry land will get one acre, which is no longer a viable unit. On the other hand, an option is open for counterbalancing the excessive division of assets, as the status of joint family is legally recognized. Married sons living together with their parents may stick together even after their father's death: the common family property will remain undivided, if they so declare.

Seen in this context, the nature of the relationship between brothers is another important factor governing the mobility strategies. Basically, three types of situation may be observed. If the sons of a modest farmer inherit only a small plot of land, and if, after quarelling, they decide to break out of the joint family and set up on their own, those who wish to move for the sake of supplementing their present income, will always do their best to conserve their property and their rural roots. In such a case, the only viable strategy for a male migrant is to leave his wife and children behind in the village, the spouse managing the small land with the help of neighbours (in a reciprocal exchange of work) and recruitment of coolies on a daily wage. But in most cases, the brothers will remain on good terms, if only because an agreement is a pre-requisite for adopting a fruitful family strategy

for mutual benefit. They may or may not declare themselves formally as a joint family but they will keep the "joint family spirit" alive. In such a case, the male migrant leaving his wife back in the village knows that his field will be (suitably?) looked after by his brother. Such an understanding paves the way for a third possibility: the nuclear family may even move for a few years or more, secure in the knowledge that the land will be faithfully cultivated by the brother staying in the village. In such a case, the land belongs clearly to the migrant, whilst the tilling brother keeps for himself the fruits of the cultivation, without any detailed contract agreed upon by the brothers: the man staying in the village will not be considered as a tenant of his brother. The migrant may just take some grains during his annual visit home, or, quite often, he may simply wait for his brother to give him something on his own accord. In both cases whether the migrant leaves his wife and children back or not, a strong link is maintained with the village where blood ties, in addition to being an emotional bond also serve an economic purpose, as the land of the migrant is safely preserved: a land he will get back when he decides to settle down in the village, after having eventually spent decades outside.

A third factor sustains specifically the male mobility: the social and individual acceptance of the long separation between couples. As a matter of fact, the wife accepts the separation stoically—provided money orders are regularly sent by the husband. When questioned about the difficulties of such a life, the spouses normally provide stereotyped answers which simply express the dominant view of a social consensus: "There is no choice if we don't have any money here", "It is all right if husband and boys go away: rains play truant and there is no work here". But more ambiguous statements reveal their inner feelings: "This is woman's fate. One has to adjust..."

From all the facts thus gleaned, it appears that a number of factors—social, economical and cultural parameters—combine within themselves to help maintain a high ratio of rural population: the poor labourer from the irrigated areas sticks to his village where there is more employment than elsewhere; the seasonal migrant drawn by sugarcane crushing jobs treks back to his dry village year after year to till his small plot (even if he decides to move for good, he will remain a villager in the irrigated area where he used to come seasonally); the male migrant going to town for years leaves usually behind him his wife and children; and almost all those who go to town with their family, after securing a permanent job entitling them to the benefits of a pension will, during the first generation at least, retire to their village, where they have built a house and expanded their landed property.

Such are the basic trends sustaining a considerable retention of rural population, combined with the practice of mobility. It is important, however, to understand that beyond such general trends, a number of subtle strategies are at work. Detailed studies conducted in the sample villages help to put into perspective these strategies and the diverse rationales backing them. In the process, a much more intricate picture emerges, where social types as well as individual choices define a wide spectrum of behaviours, expressing the various answers given by the villagers to the quest for security governing most, and to the challenge of change met by a few.

RATIONALES AND STRATEGIES: A FEW SIGNIFICANT LIFE STORIES

Before analyzing rationales and strategies, it is important to reject apriorisms: in the rural Indian society of today, there is no omnipresent or general tropism for urbanization. The rural life is still perceived by most as the best going provided there is work for the poor, and rain for all. It is the best one, for in the village change is not affecting tradition in a traumatic manner. New techniques and new aspirations (consideration for schooling for instance) are found to be compatible with the respect reserved for customs and values upon which social life is based. For many, the razzle-dazzle of cities is not the decoy. Towns and cities are places that one may visit, but not for the purpose of settling down unless suitably equipped.

The maze of rationales and strategies observed in the villages can perhaps be clarified by confronting a general principle with social types. The quest for security is probably the most acknowledged principle governing all types of villagers, in all types of rural systems. But of course, the concept of security takes on different meanings for different people. For the destitute, security is a question of plain day-to-day survival. For those comparatively better off, the quest for security allows for risks dictated by the desire to improve the family lot. In fact, risk is perhaps an overstatement: in most cases, the risk involved is nothing but the result of a strategy of innovation for the family concerned. But the point precisely is that innovation almost always lends itself to security in many ways. On one hand innovation *per se* is rarely attempted. It is often more an adoption by a family of a strategy already followed by other families residing in the village or in surrounding villages. On the other, the new strategy never supposes a complete break with the past. In order not to put all one's eggs in a single basket, diversity and plurality are the rule. If mobility or educa

tion are seen as innovative, not everyone in the family will usually be educated, or will move. The risk, in this context, merely denotes the uncertainties of the future. Even if all the expectations are not fulfilled, all will not be lost.

Taking into consideration the wide disparities observed in the rural Indian society, one may suggest two typologies. The first one could be founded on a tripartite division which would distinguish the real poor from the cautious small peasant and the educated well-to-do. In a way, these socio-economic categories also express another important factor: the higher you are placed in the hierarchy, the wider are the options before you. Some observers have noted in different contexts that the really poor have nothing to lose. It is true upto a point, and the studies conducted in some large Indian metropolises do mention families of pavement-dwellers who have lost everything and have moved on to the big cities for survival. But if this were the regular trend, if all the deprived and destitute were to migrate to towns, then the ratio of rural population in India would not be as high as it is today. On the other hand, we observed in Karnataka that many amongst the poorer section have something to lose. It could be their last plot of land, even if tiny. It could either be their chains, as Marx said. But many men choose to cling to the last vestiges of a family past, and even to their chains, as we shall see below.

Does this question the validity of a second typology? When considering those who narrated to us the story of their life, when ascertaining the gap between those who progress and expect to improve their lot and those who have lost at the game of change, or who are condemned to lose soon enough a clear picture emerges: there is a major dividing line between those who can choose, and those who cannot.

Poverty and the acceptance of rurality

True, every one has to choose some day or the other. But the tragedy of the really poor is that once they have made a choice —be it the choice to accept their fate— they are left without any scope for improvement. Listening to their tale of woe, it is perfectly clear that they do not have any say regarding their future. Four distinct life stories may be briefly presented in this context, to illustrate the significant variations in the correlation between poverty and the acceptance of rurality.

First let us take Kempe Gowda —a childless Vokkaliga from Mottahalli⁶. His father and uncle —womanizers both of them, if we were to go by hearsay— lost the eight acres they possessed. Adopted by an aunt, Kempe was made a *kaiamalu*, a permanent servant, 15 or

20 years ago. He still works for the same master and is authorized to work only for him for theoretically eight rupees and three meals a day, except on his weekly holiday. He hence works more than a free agricultural labourer (more days a year, more hours a day) for lower wages, which are in fact reduced to next to nothing as he has to repay to his master a debt contracted three years ago. He expects to be free after one year: a state he greatly covets and idealizes, for the free labourers even if reduced to eat only twice a day, at least have the choice to work or not work. In fact Kempe Gowda, when released from his (unlawful) bondage, hopes to continue working as a free labourer for the same master, demanding this time ten rupees and three meals a day for a 10 to 12 hours a day work. The rationale is clear enough: "why to look for a different master, when everything would be the same?" Evident also is his desire to stay where he is: "I am from this place, and I have my house here". A small house, in the new village ward so appropriately named *Garibi Colony*, the "colony of poverty". And also, saved from his father's wreck, or owned by his adoptive mother, a small piece of wet land (half an acre) which he can till with his master's bullocks free of charge, and which brings enough rice for his wife and his mother, who make a living themselves as free agricultural labourers. On the whole, a life bound to a landlord's prosperity, and no ambition whatsoever, the only possible horizon for an illiterate in his position being to survive as an agricultural labourer stuck to his house and his plot of land. Lack of money and a bleak future do not dull a sense of humour which could well be a mask to hide his despair: "If I had any ideas for improving my fate, I could have just as well ruled the country!".

Take the instance of Mari Gowda, a poor Vokkaliga from Mayagonahalli. He owns 1,75 acre, of which only 1 acre is fit for (dry) cultivation. He received one acre from the government years ago, but was compelled to sell 75 cents "for eating". He ploughs with cows, not bullocks and has a she-buffalo for milk. Six months a year, he has to work as a coolie for contractors engaged in roadworks: practically, it amounts to 7 to 10 days of work per month, at eight Rs. a day, without food. During the ploughing and harvesting times, he also finds work. In a village where a number of poor marginal farmers migrate for years to far off cities, Mari Gowda has made his choice, once and for all: he will not move. Not that the opportunity did not arise: on the contrary, three close relatives of his wife live in Bombay. But he never accepted their proposal to join them: "I don't like the idea of moving out... I prefer to starve for three days rather than eat in a restaurant... I love my land, I was born for that... It is better to stay in the village..." Never was he tempted to migrate. Never did he go to Mandya, the district headquarters, 45 kms from his village. In his janata house facing the

fields of Mayagonahalli, with the Basavana inselberg lining the horizon, in the distant, Mari Gowda, the illiterate, sticks to his meagre land out of emotional attachment, not exempt from strain. He made his choice and has to abide by it. Once he had rejected the outside world, he had to pay the price: someone else had to go to Bombay —his eldest son, aged 11 years now, who was adopted by Mari Gowda's sister-in-law for relieving his parents from a life of misery. A son lost, and no hope in the horizon save —who knows?— for the second son, who goes to school as his younger sister does. "I'll make a cultivator of him" dreams his father...

Those who do not want to go to town, —or who do not know how to get an urban job— may avail of the job opportunities offered by the intensive irrigated agriculture, in the Krishnarajasagar command area. Meet Nanja Shetty, one among the poor coolies working in the cane crushers of Mottahalli for a few months in a year. His story is significant. He lives in one of the hamlets of Kuderu, a large village in the dry tracts of Chamrajnagar taluk, in the south of Mysore district. His father had six acres, and four sons: an inadequate ratio, in these dry lands. Piece by piece, most of the fields were sold off, particularly after a severe drought which compelled roughly half of the village poor to sell lands at a low price to those who could face up to harsh times. Today, Nanja has one acre which he shares with his brothers, and has four sons : eight people in toto live at home, with his mother, his wife, and a young daughter. No one is literate. Twelve years ago, Nanja came for the first time to Mottahalli, recruited by a contractor for working in a crusher. Since then, every year in June he comes for about five months. The first year he brought with him his eldest son, still a young boy. Now the three teenagers are with him, whilst his brothers and their sons work in some other crushers in nearby villages. Working as a team of six or seven men and boys and paid 20 rupees per quintal of jaggery produced, each worker can expect between 15 and 20 rupees a day, 20 to 25 days per month. Forced to stop work when it rains, and to work at night if electric power fails during the day, almost all the crusher workers are outsiders, who feel that their hard seasonal work in the sugarcane area enable them to live, but do not permit to save much, as they have to pay for their food and tea when in Mottahalli. However they come back, year after year. Nanja, like the others, has received "advances" from the landlord owning the crusher: a few hundred or few thousand rupees —between 2000 and 3000 in his case. These "advances", as they are called even in Kannada, are at the core of the system of seasonal migration. The landlords of these villages, devoted to intensive cultivation, have usually granted other advances to the local free labourers, in order to safely rely upon them for the actual agricultural work. Hence the need for outsiders for the hard crusher

work, and the advances dangled as bait to get them back during the next season. These advances are not always reimbursed, but this "loss" borne by the landlord may be considered as a kind of overpayment which although binding to the outsiders procures them a secure seasonal job. It is thus the acceptable price to pay by the landlord for obtaining vital reliable manpower, so to say. Seen from a different angle, however, this advance system is nothing but an unequal agreement between rich men and their debtors, which expresses also the regional inequality between rich tracts and poor dry lands. The strategy of Nanja Shetty and his peers is based on this geographical duality. The resources of the "green revolution area", clearly enough, help to stabilize two types of rural labourers: those from the area itself, who are not tempted to move out, and some labourers from dry areas who come seasonally here, and, thanks to the additional income they get that way, stick to their native dry village, where the landless or the quasi-landless struggle for life in various ways: besides cultivating (with his brothers) one acre of jowar, Nanja Shetty works as a general coolie in the village whenever possible. He sells chillies; he fashions ropes of coir with his family, and his wife picks up mulberry leaves several times a year —the cash crop expanding quickly there in the dry lands. Life is better in his village, so he says, but in the dry lands, there is no work throughout the year, and the local landlords do not give advances. He knows that in town, in Mysore city particularly, the coolie wages in building work are higher. Some labourers of his village have found seasonal jobs in the nearby towns, but as for himself he lacks the contacts required for such a change, and hence is not tempted to move if not assured of a permanent urban job. Nor is he tempted to settle down for good in Mottahalli, as some seasonal workers have done. Is this an emotional attachment to what is left of his lost property, and to a family past? "My father's house is there, in Kuderu, I don't want to leave it".

The story of Kempamma, an illiterate Vokkaliga of Mottahalli will provide another example of pauperization. Her husband passed away one year ago, leaving her with seven children and about two acres, partly irrigated. The eldest son, 28, had left the family earlier and settled down on his own with more than one acre. He is also working as a coolie. The eldest daughter is married and the youngest one, 13, will be married shortly provided a neighbour advances a loan for the wedding. The second son, 20, is now the real head of the family, managing the land, and working as coolie, including in the local crushers. The youngest sons, 18, 15 & 12 respectively, work as coolies, the last two being totally illiterate. Irony of fate, the (relatively) most educated son, who studied up to the eight standard is now employed as "permanent servant" in a nearby village. In the family

house, in the heart of Mottahalli, a couple of she-buffalos, four sheeps, one goat live with their human masters. Too little land, too many children, no education or a brief terminated school attendance: the mechanisms of an irremediable proletarianization are all there. "We eat. We live our life", says a quiet and restrained Kempamma. They live. But they definitely cannot have any say in their future, and all the children—except may be the eldest who severed ties with his father years ago—are faced with exceedingly grim prospects. Significantly enough, none has considered moving to town...

Despite the diversity of the life stories just presented, a few major points emerge. Mari Gowda refused to move, while Nanja Shetty has been a seasonal migrant for years. Kempamma has to sustain a family of six people with two acres while Kempe Gowda, as a permanent servant, hardly brings anything home to his wife. However all of them have something in common. All come from families who had more land before, but lost most of it due to hard times or as a result of subdivision between brothers. All of them, those who have made a negative choice (not to move) or a positive one (to move for a few months in a year) as well as those who, in a way, have made no choice at all, are now in a similar position as there is no option left to them. Someone as Nanja Shetty who seems to know his mind the most is in fact a lost man, without any genuine initiative, and condemned to follow the beaten tract. Like all others, he has evolved a strategy for survival, but his family future can only worsen: his four sons are not any better trained than he or his three brothers were. In two generations, the pauperization and proletarianization of his family have been decisive. However all of them, the Kempammas, the Made and the Kempe Gowdas, the Nanja Shettys have stuck to their roots, and remained rural. The town represents for them and for those like them, almost a non-existing horizon. They say they have good reasons for sticking to their village where effectively they have a house, a patch of land, a social structure which helps, even at the cost of exploitation. As many of them admit frankly, they have also a good reason not to move. They are illiterate and the town, therefore, is not for them. We shall see later that all the illiterates, in the Nagamangala villages in particular, differ on this issue.

Considering now those who have an option, but who prefer to keep their rural roots through more elaborate strategies, we will understand how important the question of education actually is⁷.

Initiative, and the quest for an urban-rural balance

Amongst those who really try to improve their lot and to build up the future of their family, two broad categories may be distinguished. In

the poor dry villages around Nagamangala, a long range-long term male migration to far-off cities is a common solution to the challenge posed by rural limitations. In the rich irrigated villages near Mandya, on the other hand, the relations established with the outside world are not so clear. Here again the differentiation between these types and their subtypes cannot hide the fundamental similitude upon which all these strategies are based: an attempt at a diversification of means, keeping the rural roots, and adding to what agriculture offers, either urban, semi-urban or rural non-agricultural resources. Commanded by and large by the inequality of regional assets, the two distinct strategies, nevertheless, rely upon a common principle of division of labour inside the family as we have underlined before.

The Nagamangala taluk, a drought prone area, is one of those poor agricultural tracts known in south Karnataka for their dependence upon migration. Basically two types of migrants are found here. The first one provides a good example of those long range migrations that bring to metropolises the illiterate poor hailing from one specific area and "specialized" in only one trade. Calcutta has its Oriya plumbers, Paris had for a long time its chimney sweepers from Savoy, its masons from Creuse. Bombay has, amongst others, its "hotel" cleaners and waiters from Nagamangala taluk. Naragalu and Mayagonahalli, in this regard, have only followed the example set by other villages of the area, the connection with far-off Bombay, some 1000 kms away, being probably established through the enterprising Brahmin communities of Dakshin Kannad who have set up "Udipi hotels", i.e. cheap vegetarian restaurant of standard quality, all over South and West India. Village boys, through their association with older villagers, go there in their teens and start as lowly paid cleaners, working, eating and sleeping in the "hotel" premises. If promoted, they will eventually become waiters ("suppliers" as they say). This houseless, hearthless life is acceptable for bachelors but not for married men, and the salary drawn from this job do not usually enable them to rent a room for a couple, given the high prices in Bombay. Once married, the migrant generally leaves his wife back with his family as custom dictates that the young bride should settle down with the groom's parents⁸. We have noted earlier how this practice, coupled with the joint family system, provides twin securities: the wife and the children are not left to fend on their own and the land is managed either by a brother or by the wife when the husband is in Bombay.

This is how Tammaiah, a Kuruba farmer from Naragalu, lived for fifteen years. At the cost of a very long separation, he has maintained his small property (two acres of dry land) and has even added to it slightly by buying after his recent return to the village, a

two-room house and a tiny coconut grove. Was it worthwhile to sacrifice a family life for this? Having reverted to farming since 1989, he discovered that his land was not bringing him more than what his Bombay job did and he has kept his options open: may be he will go back to Bombay if the village income gets too low.

Those who go to Bombay with nothing but vague contacts try after a few years to graduate up from their lowly position as cleaner and waiter. Sticking to food business, they try to set up their own *baji* trade, selling in the streets snacks composed of bread, onions and potatoes which constitute the lunch of most bombayites commuting daily to the city from their suburbs. Suresh, 17 years old, who has been in this profession since six years, left Naragalu when his father, who had himself moved to Bombay at the age of 11, called him over to expand his trade, in order to repay heavy debt contracted at home (for a well and for Suresh's elder sister's wedding). Two other men from Naragalu are employed by his father, the four of them living in one single room.

Bore Gowda provides another example of social promotion. The first man from Naragalu to migrate to Bombay after a six month stay at Bhadravati where his work as a coolie was too lowly paid, Bore Gowda started out as a restaurant cleaner before turning bus cleaner two years later. Three years later, he became a bus driver, and was lucky enough to get a job in a Central Government institution. Having a regular pay-check, he could offer to bring his wife to Bombay when he married in 1957. But the long tours of her husband left his wife unhappy in this alien city. Bore Gowda was thus transferred at his request to Bangalore where his wife felt more at home in a Kannada speaking city and closer to her village. They stayed there for 32 years, and begot seven children, several of them now settled for good in the big city. Bore Gowda, since leaving home at 15, always thought of retiring to his village. His father had eight acres and four sons. His elder brother, and later his nephew, tilled Bore's share during all these years. Bore added to his two acres 1,75 irrigated acres in two plots, and built a house on the road, where he retired in 1989, to manage his fields.

To be on a government or a semi-public company payroll naturally pushes the migrants to spend their entire active life in town. If Bore Gowda carved a place of his own, combining both professional and geographical mobility, Siddaiah, now in his seventies, relied upon a more secure, if limited way to make it. In the Nilgiris, 200 kms south of Mysore, the British had established a hill station, Ootacamund (Ooty), where the colonial government of the Madras Presidency used

to stay during the hot season. Government buildings as well as private bungalows required a number of gardeners. A few of them, since the twenties or the thirties, come from Naragalu. So did Siddaiah, who retired seven years ago. So did his elder son, still a government gardener, while his second son found a job in a government furniture factory established there. The third son, who failed to find a job in Bangalore, looks after the family fields at Naragalu (2,5 acres) and lives with his mother who has settled there, in the new house Siddaiah has built "in his ancestral place". The old man, however, lives most of the time in Ooty, with his elder sons.

In the Karnataka context, where the truly landless are few, such long range-long term strategies of urban migration are dependent upon the family agreement regarding the control of the land of those who are away. This is particularly true for those who, having found a government job, spend their entire active life away with their wife and children, while those getting more uncertain jobs go alone, or with a son, and might be tempted, as Tammaiah did, to settle down in the village in their forties. A Vokkaliga family from Mayagonahalli clearly illustrates such a strategy. Rame Gowda, 25, and still a bachelor, the youngest son of a Vokkaliga family, owns with his three brothers eight acres of dry land, of which three are now irrigated by a pumpset. The farm offers a good example of the new agricultural trends that one now comes across in these dry tracts around the new pumpsets. The individual irrigation brings cash crops : tomatos, mulberry, coconuts. Rame Gowda has enough resources and is enterprising enough to make the most of his crops, by transforming himself his productions. Mulberry brought sericulture, started three years ago and bound to expand further, while coconuts stocked and dried for a whole year are sold at a much higher price for making coprah. This image of relative prosperity, however, expresses only one side of the family strategy. Of the four brothers who kept the property in the sole name of their late father, the eldest and the youngest are the least educated (4th standard: hardly literate). They manage the farm. The other two, slightly better educated (S.S.L.C. failed and 7th standard) have gone out: one to Bangalore, where he works in the Police department at a low grade, the other one to Bhadravati, where he found a job in the steel company. Both have thus secured a permanent government or public sector employment. They are now urbanized, they don't ask for a share of the farm returns. But they did not have to sever all ties with their village. They have married girls from Nagamangala taluk, and they go back home twice a year. They will retire there.

Such a balanced strategy between the rural heritage and urban prospects is also found in much richer areas. Founded since five

decades on the high returns of large scale canal irrigation, the economy of Mottahalli does not drive away with alarming regularity the male villagers looking for additional income to far-off cities. In the older days, when the village near its old tank remained mostly dry, seasonal workers went every year to the Western Ghats during the coffee plucking season. This disappeared around 1950 and today, except when motivated by individual choice, there is no specific movement—seasonal or otherwise—from the village to faraway places. But, in their own way, the provident peasants of Mottahalli—those who really try to build up a future for their family—develop plans which tend to make use of both the rural assets at their disposal as well as the urban (or non-agricultural) income that education may provide. In an area where the urban or semi-urban network is stronger than in the under-urbanized Nagamangala taluk, the local towns or market places may offer nearer opportunities.

Ninge Gowda, a medium-small farmer living in the heart of Mottahalli, has three irrigated acres, half an acre of dry land, two sons, and a married daughter. This is a better fate than most, but Ninge thought rightly that his sons, after his death, will get hardly enough land for reasonable living. He goaded his elder son to study upto the S.S.L.C. (taking a permanent servant for a few years, in order to compensate the loss of manpower). As usual, the S.S.L.C. holder lost interest in agriculture. The younger son, on the other hand, did badly at school, and dropped out while in the 3rd standard. For the elder son, Ninge Gowda invested 1000 Rs in a petty shop five years ago, and this has now grown into a small provision store, set up in a rented building in the outskirts of Mandya. The younger son manages the property with his father, and both the sons live with him, in Mottahalli, from where the shopkeeper commutes daily by bus. Here is a clear example of how to make use of the town without actually becoming an urban dweller, thanks to town proximity. Ninge Gowda knew how to diversify his resources in accordance with his sons' likes and dislikes, and has evolved a clear cut strategy built on the understanding between the three male money-earners of the family.

Chikke Gowda went even a step further in the sophisticated approach of diversification. He was bent upon education for all his three sons and managed his four acres, mainly irrigated, by himself. For his eldest and youngest sons, he rents a room in Mandya, where they prepare for their B.Sc. and S.S.L.C. degrees respectively. At home, says their father, they would have been constantly drawn away from their studies: better to concentrate on them and live near their college. The second son is also "away": he found a job as attender in a rural bank, in a village not far from Mottahalli. An astute and resolute

father, Chikke Gowda knows that his perfectly planned strategy is risky for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is unusual to push all the sons away from agriculture. The careful practice, as we have seen, is normally to keep to the fields one out of two, or two out of four sons. Secondly, education by itself does not guarantee to satisfactory employment: in all the villages, one comes across unemployed educated young men, who, with S.S.L.C., B.A., or B.Sc., degrees do not want to be mere peasants. The first risk is probably the least serious one. In all likelihood, one of his sons will take over the property after his death: one cannot imagine three heirs discarding ancestral property... Chikke Gowda toys uneasily with the second hypothesis: "who knows if they will get a job?" For getting a government job, one needs connections, bribes have to be paid... At least, says Chikke, once educated they will make better farmers, even if they fail to secure a job... although he believes, apparently assuming the contradiction, that educated farmers get only slightly better yields.

The rationale of a Chikke Gowda, however risky, is in fact based upon experience —another farmer's experience. For those medium-small enterprising peasants of Mottahalli, the success story of D.S. Gowda seems to have set a new trend. D.S.'s father, as Chikke Gowda today, was an illiterate medium farmer, owning four irrigated acres. He had also three sons and a daughter. The elder remained illiterate, the youngest passed S.S.L.C.. The second one, D.S., was pushed to attend college by his mother. He passed his B.Sc., then did his B.Ed., from Mysore. He could have applied for an urban teacher job, but he disliked city life and opted for his village, since his family "needed his guidance". At the same time —and that's how a destiny is shaped— a private high school newly created at Kottati, the nearby village on the road to Mandya, offered him a teacher's job. Twenty years later, D.S. Gowda is a high school master and well-paid by the government too⁹.

In the meantime, as the leading strategist of the joint family affairs, he has considerably expanded the ancestral property: with his brothers, he now owns 14 acres (out of which 12 are irrigated), a sugarcane crusher, and the only tractor and trailer of the village. To the ancestral home, the family added 15 years ago a large house in the village itself, built in the traditional style, and very recently, a new large house, of urban type, on the crusher site. In less than a generation, D.S. Gowda, who opted for the village rather than the city, has become one of the richest landlords of Mottahalli. Educated, and a competent agriculturist, he is also drawing a good and secure government salary. For those with ambition for their children, he is the living proof that education and rurality can go together and pay rich dividends...

Uncertainty and failure: on strategies that did not work

But the profile of a D.S. Gowda's rise is not easily imitated. For many illiterate peasants, to be educated is to have a S.S.L.C. degree, which is in fact the very first step up a long ladder, and is hardly by itself a key for employment. D.S. Gowda succeeded in his two-fold strategy because, as a B.Ed. holder, he was also qualified for a specific teaching job. On the other hand, village B.A. or B.Sc. holders with no specific qualifications do not easily find an urban assignment, if they have no contact with administrators or enterprises. The well-to-do unemployed B.A. has become a village social type, with numerous sub-types of course.

Here for instance is Sidde Gowda, a Vokkaliga from a well-off joint family of Mottahalli owning ten irrigated acres and a crusher. His three brothers are educated at S.S.L.C. or P.U.C. level, and manage the property. Sidde, 28, the second son, chose to go further, and passed a B. Engineering degree in 1984. Unfortunately, for a few consecutive years, the State Government put a stop to the recruitment of B.Eng. holders in its technical departments. Then Sidde Gowda, who speaks English, started dreaming: a friend of his, a First class M.Sc., went to Chicago, and got the green card. Sidde was tempted to follow him, but failed to secure a passage to the U.S.A.. In 1987, he discovered in the "Deccan Herald" some advertisements for Civil Engineer jobs in Saudi Arabia and in the Philippines. He applied for them, without any success. Since then, he keeps a lookout in the newspapers, still dreaming of going abroad for three to ten years, and to come back to his village after saving enough for investing a few lakhs of rupees in a mechanized brick factory that he would build there. In the meantime, as a transitory position, he set himself in 1988 as a contractor, providing men, stones and sand to the building sites linked with the Hemavati Irrigation Project, in the nearby K.R.Pet taluk.

On a subdued note, and with lesser unfulfilled ambitions, Chikke Gowda's story echoes, in Naragalu, the same uncertainty. The elder son of a family owning 10 dry acres and an expanding coconut grove, Chikke, 21, failed to pass his B.A. last year. The hope to get a government job—which was his main motivation—faded and the prospect of recruitment with the P.U.C. as a lowly paid clerk in a private company was not very tempting. Another strategy failed as well. A maternal uncle of his (a very important position in an Indian family) is a lorry driver for the large Bajaj company based in Pune, Maharashtra. For six months, Chikke went with him as a cleaner, on interstate long distance trips. But his uncle never accepted to teach him driving and, disappointed again, Chikke came back to his village.

A third type of attempt—to get a job in a Bangalore or a Bhadravati factory—failed also, for lack of contacts.

Beyond their disparities, these two cases offer fairly good illustrations of these well off—or relatively well off—educated or semi-educated young men who, to put it frankly, can afford to wait. Tying with ideas, they shift from one strategy to another one with not much determination nor much perseverance: the family and the landed property are their safeguards. They dream, between two worlds, but interestingly, they are still very much rural. Sidde Gowda, in fact, enjoys his local status and village life, and, growing older, he may well stick for good to his present contractor job which permits him to retain a base at Mottahalli. As for Chikke Gowda, who studied at the small Nagamangala town by commuting daily from his village, he is still at a loss, and quite irresolute. He would be disappointed if all attempts to move were to fail, but he would accept it, he says, opting for a philosophy which expresses clearly, in its simplicity, the hard choice that he faces, as the eldest son who could make a pretty decent living out of family fields: "Outside, I may get money. In the village, I have my relatives, my people. Both are important"...

Disappointment, however, is not just the sad fate of those who, longing for a change, have not moved much, geographically or economically. Even those who have more or less succeeded in improving their position admit that some of their strategies had failed sometime or the other. A recurrent reason for these partial disappointments rests with the family itself. In a joint family, all brothers may agree on an overall distribution of responsibilities, but all will not always accept the proposals made by the most enterprising amongst them. In order to be more often in Naragalu, Tammaiah suggested to his brother that he share with him his work in Bombay: hence each one would spend six months in the city and six months at home. After a few weeks in Bombay, his brother decided to cut short this trial, and the astute strategy of going to the far-off city by rote failed. However successful he may be, D.S. Gowda had also to make concessions to the reluctance displayed by his brothers. Playing the twin cards of teaching and agriculture, he would have liked, a decade ago, to invest also in town. According to his plans of extended diversification of the family resources, his younger brother, a P.U.C., would have started in Mandya town a printing house, a small scale industry, or a trade. But the young man declined, not willing to settle down in town. More recently, D.S. Gowda was considering another diversification: to set up a small cinema house on the main road to Mandya. His elder brother objected this time to the large investment and

high borrowings involved. The family invested much less, but in agriculture, and bought a tractor...

One would have noted that in all these cases bringing major disenchantments or minor disappointments, the failure of temporary hopes contributed towards keeping people in their village. Without taking into account more life stories, we may now attempt to build a synoptic view of the strategies recorded and the issues at stake.

THE ROOTS OF MAN

Coming back to our initial starting point, let us now try to understand why this population sticks to its rural roots with such resilience, and leave for a later study the problem of the representativeness of Karnataka, which is in fact not very different from the All-India picture. A few significant points seem to emerge in this regard.

Values, traditions and change

Looking at the villagers' rationales, it would be impractical to underestimate the weight of individual psychological factors. Everyone, of course, is subject to some socio-economic determination, but up to a certain extent there is also —theoretically— a relative margin of freedom, even for those caught up in an exhausting struggle for survival. "To migrate or to stay?" is a question that troubles every village family, for at least one member of the family, be it wealthy or impoverished, is prone to move, for different reasons. Encompassing choices and constraints, social determination and individual freedom, the predominant system of values acts, consciously or unconsciously, as a major guideline for practically everyone. This system is not immutable, and traditions are partly and slowly eroded in India as elsewhere. But field observations confirm the strength of the prevalent ideology, which valorizes rurality quite understandably in a society so predominantly rural.

In their classic village monographs of Rampura and Wangala and Dalena, all of them close to "our" Mottahalli, both Srinivas and Epstein underlined the prestige attached to land ownership¹⁰. This prestige enjoyed by the upper caste upper class landlords explains for a part the strategies of diversification which keeps the land as the stronghold of the family wealth. But the attachment to the village, interestingly, goes much beyond this prestige, shared only by the privileged. At a lower

level a small-time landholder will at least enjoy the dignity accorded to a cultivating peasant. Still lower, the marginal farmer owning only a poor plot of land, and compelled to work mainly as an agricultural labourer will also be greatly attached to his small field, eventually for opposite reasons: either this plot is all that remains of the ancestral family property and hence is the precious testimony of past glory, or it is *darkhast* land, given to the poor by the government, and hence the decisive mark of relative improvement in the status of the poor man. The fact that most of the village families, including the Harijans and a number of "attached labourers", have at least a small piece of land contributes consistently towards strengthening the rural roots.

The valorization of rurality, however, goes far beyond the socio-economic status given to the land. The village constitutes also a world by itself, and village life, a way of life. Naturally the actual village life is torn by tensions and factions, but for most of the villagers, these conflicts are a part of a known social order—a moving one, true, but nonetheless an order where they have a place, be it low, or even dwindling. The same could be said of course for the family interrelationships. Studies on migrants conducted in the large metropolises have shown that for some of them, familial conflict was the reason for migration. But on the whole, statistically, the family is seen as a precious protective body¹¹.

We have seen how, precisely, the family cohesion, despite occasional jolts, allows for long separation between couples, and for the male migration to Bombay. Significantly, the bachelors who go to Bombay in their teens, or even in their early teens, will marry, years later, girls from their home area, the union being, as per tradition, fixed by elders. As young Suresh put it crudely, during his second return to Naragalu in six years: "Bombay girls have only style, but they will not work hard". Those who like him have left home years ago, live in Bombay with people from their village or from neighbouring villages, and their home place is a focal point in their perspectives for the future, on many counts: for getting a bride, for buying a plot of land and a house if savings permit it and ultimately for retirement also.

In this conceptual approach of the Naragahallu illiterate, the city is a place where one has to go for earning a livelihood. It is not an end by itself. It is not even something cut off from tradition, as the first migrants to Bombay, retired today to their ancestral place, moved there almost five decades ago. No: Bombay, said to be the most seducing showroom of Indian modernity, is just a part of a strategy anchored mainly in the village.

The perspective is quite different for the children of migrants who have settled in town with wife and kids. These children have been brought up in an urban milieu, and are equipped to face the challenge of a permanent urban life. They are not alien to their roots, as their parents visit their village regularly and even retire there ultimately, but naturally these urban youth, born and brought up in the town, don't regard the village in the same emotional manner as their rural relatives. This transformation of values is strongly reinforced by the fact that the parents had made of use the security of their permanent government or semi-public job to educate all their children, while in the village the strategy of unequal access to school is still prevalent. Moreover, facilities are offered to government servants, for the education of their children, and migrant parents, in this context, know how to make the best of the existing measures (reservation of seats, scholarships, etc.).

The case of the family of Bore Gowda, who spent with his wife and children 32 years in Bangalore before retiring as a farmer in his home village of Naragalu, is particularly significant in this regard. A rural illiterate who, as we have seen, migrated first as a coolie then as a restaurant cleaner to Bombay before becoming driver for a Central Government institute, Bore Gowda has seven children, all educated enough to aspire for a job. The eldest, a daughter with a S.S.L.C., is a clerk at the Legislative Assembly in Bangalore, and is married to a qualified turner working in a leading industrial company, Escort. The second child, a boy, is a government driver, living also in Bangalore. The third one, a daughter, who passed S.S.L.C., lives with her husband in Mandya town. The young brothers who followed have taken up what has more or less become the family way of social promotion: both are S.S.L.C., one has obtained a diploma in mechanics, the other is preparing for one. The fate of the last two children is particularly revealing of the parents carefully evolved strategy. The youngest son was sent to the village with his uncle before his parents retired: he will take over in due course the family lands. The youngest daughter, 10, on the other hand, lives in Bangalore with her older brother and attends an English medium private school: a sure way to climb up the social ladder later... Out of seven children, the three elders are now settled in town for good, and the youngest being all educated in English will under the circumstances marry an urban groom. One son, and only one, was singled out to be the future family property-holder and hence was made a villager. For the two remaining sons, Bore Gowda did his best, trying to add to the education (the S.S.L.C.) a professional qualification (in mechanics). But there is no assurance of employment in this field and while the third son is still studying mechanics, the second one, Mahesh, his diploma in hand, found only a poorly paid job in Bangalore. He left, came to the village

with his retired parents... and presents today the typical image of the unemployed educated young man, poised between village life which he has made temporarily his own and the city where he would like to find a job. Another case of indecision, as Mahesh is qualified? Or, once again, another young man who —without coming from a wealthy family— can afford to wait, dreaming of the city while tied to the security of the village?

The geography and the state

What has been said before was focussed mainly on the social, economical and cultural parameters which set the frame for the mobility and stability rationales and strategies. The importance of socio-economic stratifications and the decisive impact of kinship relations have been underlined, while acknowledging also, naturally, the place due to individual choices. For provisionally concluding this paper — which is itself only a step in a running research project— I would like to pay attention to two additional perspectives: the geography, and the state.

The fundamental duality opposing the large irrigated areas to the standard dry tracts can hardly be overemphasized. We have noted the power of stabilization of the "green revolution" areas, which keep their poor by offering them higher employment opportunities, and which, in a way, stabilize also the poor population of some dry villages, who get much needed additional resources through seasonal circulation to the sugarcane belt. It must be noted however that this call for seasonal workers is not the lone privilege of irrigated areas: the Western Ghats plantations also draw labourers from the dry lands for a few months in a year during the coffee plucking season (but in that case, women workers are involved, and the circulation is highly organised).

Either seasonal circulation directed to other rural areas or long term migration to cities, these patterns of mobility give rise to interesting questions, as far as the use of space and mental maps are concerned. These patterns express for a part very logical geographical correlations and complementaries: no wonder seasonal workers from dry villages of Mysore district go to the Mandya sugarcane belt, or agricultural labourers from Arsikere go to Sakleshpur coffee plantations. But why don't Naragalu villagers go to the sugarcane belt, 50 kms away? Why don't they go to the Ghats, when we remember that before the implementation of large scale irrigation, the poor from Mottahalli were going to the plantations? Similarly, why do those illiterates who migrate to towns from our sample villages go as far as Bombay, skipping many large and closer cities including Hyderabad

and Bangalore? Why is it that Mysore, the regional headquarters, the old and prestigious capital of the past princely state is barely mentioned? It is as though each village had its own mental map, its dominant representation of space: large *terra incognita*, and a few known attracting centres. The distance, hence, is not a determinant factor inside the boundaries of this mental map (beyond these boundaries, on the other hand, distance is an added negative factor, though, basically, one does not move beyond these mental boundaries because it is too far, but because it is "unknown lands"). And knowledge, in this context, means simply opportunities, reliable opportunities: in other words, one can move when someone you know or someone you trust can guide you to a place —rural or urban— where something or someone will be waiting for you. Rather than the coherence of geographical proximities, what are decisive are the acquaintances you have: it could be a petty middleman bringing a few labourers to a landlord of the sugarcane belt; it could be a bigger contractor bringing by lorry thirty or fifty people from a couple of villages to a plantation, it could be an elder village man who brings you to far-off Bombay. In this regard, the answer given usually by those who settled for good in Mottahalli when asked how they came there is deceptive. They settled in this village "by chance", yes, if we consider that they could have settled just as well in the nearby village. But in fact they almost never come to this area "by chance": more often than not a contractor brought them there —or near there— when there was a massive demand for labour at the time of canal digging. This pattern of guided mobility, valid for seasonal rural circulation as well as for long term-long range urban-directed migration helps the migrants to stick to their roots, as their movements are never isolated from a network of relationships which preserve, at the decisive time of the first move, and later on as well, the contact with the home village.

Regarding now the stability of those who decided not to move, as well as the faithful attachment to their village of those who move a few months every year, or who return there after decades in town, the role of the state merits an assessment.

To stick to one's roots is certainly what Marcel Mauss termed a "total social fact". The motivations behind such a choice although apparently simple, are in fact very complex, as a number of considerations —social, economical, cultural, psychological...— are at play. In this body of determinations, the State plays its part, as one fundamental agent in the dynamics of change. Without considering here the entire spectrum of relations linking state and change, —the state is omnipresent if not omnipotent in the Indian socio-economic life— we

may confine our observations to two points, linked with the policy of retention of rural population in Karnataka.

It has been argued, in West Bengal for instance, that many of the in-migrants to large metropolises do not come from the most backward areas, but rather from the better ones (except in the immediate vicinity of large Urban Agglomerations). As for the growth of Bangalore, it is largely due to in-migrants coming from urban areas. However, the State in India tends to consider with good reasons that one of the best ways to counter an excessive urban growth is to develop the rural hinterland. In Karnataka such a development has taken two very different aspects which have a definite impact on the retention of rural population. The first one is the continuous expansion of large-scale irrigated areas. Despite the decades-old conflict with Tamilnadu on the sharing of the Kaveri waters, Karnataka still builds new dams and expands command areas. New canals are dug, for instance, in the dry lands of Hassan and north Mandya districts, in order to bring there the waters from the Hemavati, a Kaveri tributary. Besides the impact of large-scale works, providing permanent or seasonal jobs to many labourers, we may safely infer from past experience, that new irrigated lands will help to sustain the rural population. The example of Raichur district shows however the eventual limitations of large-scale projects. The lands newly irrigated by the Tungabhadra river, there, have in fact benefited more the in-migrants from coastal Andhra Pradesh who have settled there for good, than the local people, not accustomed to the irrigation practices¹². With the recent spread of micro-irrigation in the dry tracts we have observed in Mandya and Hassan—either through private initiative, or through the Governmental Watershed Development Programme—one may suspect that nowadays, peasants traditionally accustomed to dry farming will turn more easily than before to irrigated agriculture. In any case, even if at the cost of local frustration and outsiders in-migration, the balance of this expansion of large irrigation is, demographically, a positive one as far as the overall ratio of rural population is concerned.

The second type of state intervention operates on a very different scale, and results largely from the acknowledgement of the limitations of the strategy of "green revolution", in terms of social and regional inequalities. The Integrated Rural Development Programme and related policies are attempting to cope with this failure. If the impact of such programmes on the reduction of poverty and inequalities is subject to debate, it seems clear from what we observed on the field that the meagre assets which were distributed (sometimes even before the IRDP was launched, as the Devaraj Urs' ministry was fairly active in this regard) are in fact effective tools for retention of rural population.

The small plot of land or the pair of cows received by some of the poor often do not bring any fundamental economic improvement in their condition: the land is very often of poor quality, and rearing cattle demands the right kind of attention for being really profitable. But the "Janata house" given to many people changes everything. For the landless, it gave him, at last, a site that no landlord, no creditor can take away from him. And coupled with either a bad piece of land or a cow or two, this house crystallizes or reinforces the will to stay rural which is the dominant paradigm of the villagers, even the poor ones.

These recent assets, in many cases, do not resolve the problem of poverty but, however modest they may be, they do definitely strengthen the roots of those who move but come back as well as the attachment of those who refuse to move, and have chosen to make a living, come what may, in their village.

The Census of 1991 will tell us whether the pace of urbanization in India remains relatively slow. Whatever could be the trend then apparent, what we have observed today in a few villages of south Karnataka shows that dominant rationales and strategies —however diversified they may be— try usually to sustain very prudent practices which still lend a decisive importance to the village, either as the place one chooses to live in, or as a vital safeguard in a careful balance evolved between the rural and the urban worlds, thanks to the persistence of strong kinship relations. Indian towns and cities will definitely grow, and the diffusion of education will act as a stimulus for movement. But on the whole, the logics at work and the pattern of behaviours evolved today, in the present context of change, will still leave their stamp on the near future by sustaining, in their own specific Indian manner, a heavy rural population.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In this paper "mobility" denotes essentially geographical mobility. On the correlation between geographical and social mobility in a South Asian rural context (although the deadlock in Bangladesh seems much worse when compared to the situation in Karnataka), see W. Van Schendel, *Peasant Mobility. The Odds of Life in Rural Bangladesh*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1982, particularly part I "The Study of Peasant Mobility : Up, Down and Out?"
2. This project titled "To Migrate or to Stay? A Study in Rural Change, Mobility and Retention of Village Population in India. The Case of South Karnataka" is acknowledged by the Indian Council for Social Science Research, New

Delhi, and is funded by the French Ministry of Research and by the French Institute, Pondicherry. Team members, not including the author, are Professor P.D. Mahadev (Department of Geography, Mysore University), Dr.K. Nagaraj (Fellow in Economics, Madras Institute of Development Studies), Dr.M.A. Kalam (Department of Anthropology, Madras University), Dr.P.J. Roca (CEGET-CNRS, Bordeaux), H. Guétat-Bernard, F. Landy and B.N. Shivalingappa (French Institute, Pondicherry). For a longer discussion on the issues at stake, see J. Racine: "Urban-Rural Configurations in India. Some Key Issues", *Asian Journal of Economics and Social Studies*. Vol. 7, n°2, 1988. pp.123-135. The project is a section of a larger programme titled "The Dynamics of Rural Systems. The Diversification Issue. An Approach of the Third Worlds", conducted by the Centre for Studies in Tropical Geography (CEGET-CNRS), Bordeaux.

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3. One may eventually discuss the relevance of the concept of "green revolution" here, for two reasons. First, the economic change which transformed Mottahalli area was due to the implementation of the irrigation project linked to the Krishnarajasagar. Intensification of agriculture, henceforth, started here in the forties, much before the genuine "green revolution" strategy came to being in India in the late sixties. Second, as noted here, all the "ingredients" of the typical green revolution in paddy growing areas are not found around Mandya: mechanization in general and individual pumpsets in particular are not much developed. But on the whole, the extent of irrigation, the use of high yielding varieties in paddy, the investment in sugarcane, define a type of intensive agriculture, stimulated forward by a fringe of genuine capitalist peasants, which fits pretty well with the usual pictures of green revolution in India. This is all the more noticeable when these irrigated lands are compared with the surrounding drought prone areas devoted to dry farming.
4. Rampura, where Srinivas did intensive field work, is located some 15 kms south of Mottahalli. See M.N. Srinivas: *The Remembered Village*. Delhi, O.U.P., 1976.
5. J.Breman: *Of Peasants, Migrants and Paupers. Rural Labour Circulation and Capitalist Production in West India*. Delhi O.U.P., 1985.
6. The personal names given in this paper are not the actual names of those who have been interviewed. Only the caste names if any, have been retained (i.e. Gowda = Vokkaliga caste).
7. On the impact of education on out-migration, see the study of Moonis Raza and H. Ramachandran: *Impact of Educational Levels on some Dimensions of Development*. NIEPA, Delhi and ISEC, Bangalore, 1986. For a summary of this study conducted in Tumkur District, see H. Ramachandran: "Education and Rural Out-Migration", in J. Racine (ed): *Rural Change in Karnataka*,

Pondy Papers in Social Sciences n°2, French Institute, Pondicherry, 1989, pp. 69-74.

8. This is by far the most important type of permanent migration in India. 53.8% of the total in-migrations recorded and 60.2% of rural in-migrations in the 1981 Census for Karnataka, for instance, were by female migrants, most of them being young brides having settled, as per the custom, with their husband's parents. This movement of population is not considered here: usually it infers short distance migrations, and up to some extent, each movement is compensated by its opposite : a daughter will leave, a daughter-in law will come in, both usually from nearby villages. But statistically, this type of movement inflates considerably the total figure of migrants in all Indian Censuses. (Data from B.K. Roy (ed): *Geographical Distribution of Internal Migration in India 1971-81*. New Delhi, Census of India, 1989, tables 1 and 2).
9. After a few years of practice, private schools may be recognized by the Government, and their teaching staff are granted the same privileges as Government servants (rate of pay, allowances, pension...).
10. See M.N. Srinivas, op.cit., and T.S. Epstein: *South India, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. Mysore Villages Revisited*. London, Macmillan, 1973. Wangala, one of the two villages surveyed by Epstein, is 2 kms away from Mottahalli.
11. For an analysis of these "informal security systems" provided by the village and the family, and their impact, see Monica Das Gupta: *Micro-Perspectives on the slow rate of urbanisation in India: Informal security systems and population retention in rural India*. Paper presented to the International Congress of Population Studies, Firenze, 1985. (See *Proceedings*, Union Internationale pour l'Etude Scientifique de la Population, Liège, 1985. Vol.4, pp. 249-266).
12. On this very interesting case, see P.D. Mahadev: "Permanent and Seasonal Migration in two Contrasted Rural Areas (Raichur and Sakleshpur)", in J. Racine (ed) : *Rural Change in Karnataka*, op.cit. p. 64.

Jean RACINE

**Migrer ou pas ? Mobilité et enracinement dans
les campagnes d'Inde du Sud.
Logiques villageoises dans le district de Mandya,
Etat du Karnataka**

L'importance, dans l'absolu, de la population urbaine indienne et l'ampleur des problèmes affligeant grandes et petites villes ne doivent pas masquer un fait essentiel : en dépit du manque de terre et de l'étendue de la pauvreté rurale, l'Inde réussit à maintenir dans ses campagnes environ les trois quarts de sa population. Si la part relative de la population rurale décroît lentement (76,3 % en 1981), de plus en plus d'Indiens, dans l'absolu, sont ruraux. Pour des raisons qui peuvent être opposées, il n'est guère de famille rurale qui, pour au moins l'un de ses membres, ne se soit posé la question : "migrer ou pas ?". Confrontés à ce dilemme, la plupart des villageois ont choisi de ne pas bouger, tandis que beaucoup d'autres ont adopté des stratégies qui combinent mobilité et ruralité. Le cas indien, à bien des égards, diffère sur ce plan de ce qui est observé dans bien des pays du Tiers Monde.

Un programme franco-indien essaie d'analyser dans l'Etat du Karnataka, en Inde du Sud, ces logiques de mobilité et d'enracinement, vues à la base, dans différents systèmes ruraux nettement contrastés (terres sèches, terres irriguées, montagnes, milieux littoraux). Le présent texte rend compte des analyses conduites dans deux de ces systèmes, en terres sèches et en terres irriguées, en liant les logiques et les stratégies observées aux structures familiales et sociales, aux dynamiques économiques, et aux valeurs socio-culturelles qui gouvernent la société *kannadiga*.

Mots-clés : Inde, Karnataka, Mandya
Migration, mobilité
Enracinement villageois
Terres sèches. Terres irriguées
Logiques paysannes

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